

STUDENTS IN REVOLT

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THE STORY OF THE
INTERCOLLEGIATE LEAGUE
FOR INDUSTRIAL DEMOCRACY

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The League for Industrial Democracy
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THE HISTORY of the student League for Industrial Democracy is the record of the apprenticeship of the prophets and makers of socialism in the United States. As a student movement it has pursued a steady, undeviating course in bringing students to a consciousness of the social forces at work in the world today and the role the student must play in society. It has enriched the lives of the undergraduates whom it touched, and it has achieved much in bringing nearer the co-operative commonwealth.

1905! A year after the election of Theodore Roosevelt, but more importantly to a small band of ardent intellectuals, it was the year after the Socialist vote had jumped from 100,000 to 400,000. What could they do to advance the coming of the revolution? A call went out signed by Clarence Darrow, Jack London, Upton Sinclair, William English Walling and others for the formation of an Intercollegiate Socialist Society whose primary object "was to create students of socialism, not to produce socialists." Even this disavowal of propaganda purposes did not quiet academic breasts. When Victor Berger spoke for the I.S.S., southern ministers prayed for their students to be delivered from his heretical doctrines, and college administrations began to insist that lists of speakers be first submitted to them for approval.

Jack London on the Road

The first lecture trip under the auspices of the I.S.S. was that made by Jack London. At the University of California, at Harvard and Yale and other colleges, the popular and picturesque American author and war correspondent aroused the college communities with militant addresses on "The Present Crisis," the first tour of its kind among American universities.

"I went to the University," London told the crowds who gathered to hear why he had become interested in the student movement. "I found the university, in the main, practically wholly so, clean and noble, but I did not find the university alive. I found that the American university had this ideal, as phrased by a professor in Chicago University, namely: 'The passionless pursuit of passionless intelligence'—clean and noble, I grant you, but not alive enough. . . . And the reflection of this university ideal I find the conservatism and unconcern of the American

people toward those who are suffering, who are in want. And so I became interested in an attempt to arouse in the minds of the young men of our universities an interest in the study of Socialism. We do not desire merely to make converts. . . . If collegians cannot fight for us, we want them to fight against us—of course, sincerely fight against us. But what we do not want is that which obtains today and has obtained in the past of the university, a mere deadness and unconcern and ignorance so far as Socialism is concerned. Fight for us or fight against us. Raise your voices one way or the other; be alive. That is the idea upon which we are working."

Dealing with London's Yale University speech during that trip before an overcrowded house, the conservative *New Haven Register* wrote, "The spectacle of an avowed Socialist, standing on the platform of Woolsey Hall was a sight for God and Man."

When, two-years later, the organizer of the Society went to Princeton to speak on Socialism, the students considered an address on this subject such an astonishing phenomenon that they jokingly organized a "pee-rade" in celebration of his coming, sang the Marseillaise, burned bonfires, and, during his address, hurled firecrackers and skyrockets in his direction through the windows of the hall.

The I.S.S. grew. There were soon chapters on some forty campuses. Inez Milholland founded one at Vassar, Walter Lippmann at Harvard, Bruce Bliven at Stanford, Freda Kirchwey appeared in the Barnard annals of the I.S.S. and Karl Llewellyn in the Yale. Harry Laidler, a fledgling out of Wesleyan, Rose Pastor Stokes and Jack London began touring the colleges. *The Intercollegiate Socialist Review* was founded, which Karl Liebknecht was later to tell John Reed, was the only American magazine of which he had heard.

The activities of the I.S.S. were mainly of an educational character, although it was difficult to hear Jack London without rushing out to become a dues paying member of the Socialist Party. The effect of the discussions carried on by the chapters of the I.S.S. was to make students realize their kinship with labor and their unity with the oppressed and subjugated everywhere. One could not hear such straight-from-the-shoulder adjurations as the following, delivered by Professor Ellen Hayes of Wellesley at the 1912 annual convention of the I.S.S., without aligning oneself with the Socialists: "Fellow students of the I.S.S. . . . in

order to be safe you need not retreat to a library or a laboratory and study Plato and Kant or Laplace and Darwin in the original. You may read Karl Marx or Karl Kautsky, or Hillquit and Spargo, you may even read Charles E. Russell in the original and no danger will threaten you so long you are very quiet and acknowledge only a theoretical academic interest in Socialism. But if the vision of human right and human gain once rouses your zeal and commands your service, and you bear witness to the ideal—look out for falling mercury and a chilling air! The world will weep over you and the church will pray for you—to the end that you may be rescued from the dangerous and insidious doctrine of Socialism."

Then the war came and most of the chapters of the I.S.S. were snuffed out. The draft turned the colleges into military training camps, and Socialist refusal to support the war caused many acrimonious divisions in the ranks of college radicals.

League for Industrial Democracy

Except for the student Christian movement, which at that time was not much concerned with the problem of squaring social injustice with religious teaching, the I.S.S., until the end of the war, was the only group that could be considered a student movement, and it was the only group giving attention to industrial problems.

The war ended and the chapters began to revive. But students wanted a more inclusive name than "socialist," because they believed there were several alternative approaches to a cooperative commonwealth. They wanted a name that would not necessitate innumerable explanations to students and administrations of the non-connection of their society with the Socialist Party. Others felt that the word "Intercollegiate" tended to cut them off from the technician and worker. And finally it was felt there was too much of the tradition of a study society about the I.S.S. Members wanted a society dedicated to a definite social program. And so the League for Industrial Democracy was formed, committed to a new social order based upon production for use and not for profit. Robert Morss Lovett became President, Stuart Chase, Treasurer, while Harry W. Laidler and Norman Thomas were selected Executive Directors. An Intercollegiate Council was formed to represent student activities, and

since 1921, this council, under various names, has been an effective force in the social thinking of the university world.

The Dark Ages

There were two kinds of student movements at this time. One, the L.I.D. along with the student Christian movement, endeavoring to align students with the forces of labor and a program of social reconstruction; and the other emphasizing the cultivation of the open mind and the informed student opinion. The program of the National Student Forum and its publication, *The New Student*, was animated by the belief that although, "College students are 1% of the population, 50% of the leaders of tomorrow are in our ranks. The power of the future is in our hands."

In either case these were the Dark Ages and it was very difficult to demonstrate to a student what was meant by the class struggle. In 1923 and 1924 the L.I.D. arranged debates for its undergraduate chapters on the open vs. the closed shop. At the University of Wisconsin an electric light fuse was pulled out and Debs had to speak in darkness at a meeting arranged by the chapter. The Yale Liberal Club fought to secure permission for Carlo Tresca to address an Italian audience in Waterbury, Conn. Despite a promised barrage of eggs, the Columbia L.I.D. chapter presented William Z. Foster.

The New Student and other intercollegiate publications were filled with articles about foreign youth movements and unreal peace discussions. There was great undergraduate indignation when President Atwood of Clark University stopped Scott Nearing in the middle of his address and dismissed the audience. But then the University of Michigan prevented even former Attorney General Wickersham from addressing the college on the League of Nations! Perhaps the temper of the times could best be perceived in an undergraduate resolution on war: "We, the students of Vassar College, believe that the settlement of international differences by war is fundamentally wrong," or in the presidential straw vote in November 1924, in which Coolidge polled 30,141; Davis: 13,825; and LaFollette: 7,491; and in which the latter carried only four colleges and those by slight margins.

In 1925 a tremendous agitation began against compulsory military

training. Felix Cohen's fight against the R.O.T.C. at City College attracted nation-wide attention, so that by the end of that year the *New York World* could speak of the student revolt against stupid courses, abridgment of free speech, the cheap commercialism of endowment drives, the official interpretations of American history, and against the R.O.T.C.

• Times were changing! The murder of Chinese students by British marines in Peking precipitated student protests all over the nation. The Passaic strike enlisted the support of the liberal clubs in the New York area. And that year a conference on Negro discrimination was held at Swarthmore.

Students Enter the Class Struggle

By 1927 no one could any longer refer to the student movement as one of education and inquiry only. Such contemporary phenomena as a labor union of student employees, and student protests to the White House against our invasion of Nicaragua were recorded in *The New Student* and the *L.I.D. Monthly*. At Vassar and Yale, L.I.D. members helped the Neckwear Makers Union publicize sweatshop conditions and some dozen Yale undergraduates were locked up for distributing a pamphlet they had written and printed at their own expense on conditions in the industry. The Y.M.C.A. initiated a huge student conference in Milwaukee at which the students arraigned the competitive system for profits, came out for racial equality, at which 327 voted to refuse to go to war under any conditions! At Wisconsin the L.I.D. Chapter started the organization of a nationwide student committee to free Mooney and Billings. A few weeks later the Liberal Club at the University of Pittsburgh was dissolved because it arranged for a Mooney-Billings protest meeting. The Sacco Vanzetti case had wide repercussions among undergraduate liberals clubs. The Harvard Socialist Club printed a periodical in which the first article was an arraignment of President Lowell for his part in their execution.

In 1926 the National Student Federation of America had been started at Princeton with much blowing of trumpets about a new student movement. But by December, 1927, an article appeared in *The New Student* asking, "Who Knows the N.S.F.A.?"

In 1928 *The New Student* announced: "Collegiana has chosen. And it has awarded the palm to Herbert Hoover."

From that time on there was a long line of incidents of student co-operation with labor and trade unions. In the strike of December, 1929, of the I.L.G.W.U. New York students took a prominent part in the picketing. In North Carolina, the Liberal clubs at Duke and the State University urged an official investigation into the textile industry. The L.I.D. Christmas Conference that year was devoted to an analysis of the textile industry, the experience of L.I.D. students working in the mills, the results of their investigations (cf. *Southern Labor Revolts*, L.I.D. pamphlet), and what could be done. The Harvard Socialist Club exposed the shabby treatment of the scrubwomen by the university, which was paying them under the minimum prescribed by the state law! College clubs began to take part in May Day demonstrations. 10,000 petitions against R.O.T.C. went to Washington. The Y.W.C.A. and the L.I.D. carried on a campaign for the purchase of union-made hosiery. During the summer of 1931, the student L.I.D. organized its first chautauqua to carry on educational work among the miners in West Virginia.

The depression was on! In Lewiston, Maine, Don Smith and other undergraduates at Bates helped organized an unemployed league. L.I.D. Chapters in the New York colleges split over tactics and the National Student League was formed. Two busloads of students went down to Harlan, Kentucky, in the wake of Theodore Dreiser and other intellectuals, but were barred from the county by armed deputies who told them "to hell with the Constitution." In Philadelphia, Chicago, New York and Boston, L.I.D. students picketed the homes of the capitalists who owned the mines in the southeastern corner of Kentucky. Reed Harris, the editor of the *Columbia Spectator*, was expelled and then readmitted when the first student strike in the United States was organized on the Columbia campus. At Texas University L.I.D. members forced the administration to pay higher wages to workers on a college construction job.

Down With Capitalism!

By 1932 everyone's conception of a student movement had changed. One no longer spoke of discussion clubs and the educational problems. Students were organizing because the capitalist world was in chaos. They

wanted to fight the manifestations of capitalism on the campus; and join with the expropriated and downtrodden off-campus.

At the Madison Square Garden rally of the Socialist Party in the Presidential campaign of 1932, 200 Columbia students marched in behind a banner: COLUMBIA PROFESSORS MAY WRITE ROOSEVELT'S SPEECHES BUT COLUMBIA STUDENTS VOTE FOR THOMAS. At Columbia, N. Y. U., Hunter, St. Louis University, University of Colorado, the Colorado School of Mines and C.C.N.Y., Norman Thomas ran ahead of Roosevelt and Hoover!

1932-33, depression years! L.I.D. Chapters in state universities fought legislators' efforts to reduce budgets or to increase tuition fees. L.I.D. members started an Association of Unemployed College Alumni which organized a cap and gown march on Washington.

The fight against war on the campus became more bitter. The L.I.D. organized a United Youth Conference against War in New York City which drew some 600 delegates. The N.S.L. initiated an Anti-War Congress in Chicago in which even more students participated. The Oxford resolution in which "this House pledges in no circumstances to fight for King or Country" was quickly picked up over here and subscribed to. Conferences to organize permanently against war have been held in Columbia and New York University. Several years of fighting between students and administration at City College over the presence of R.O.T.C., came to a head when twenty-one students were expelled for a Jingo Day demonstration at which President Robinson lost his head and waded into the undergraduates with his umbrella.

Twenty-nine years ago the I.S.S. was started to galvanize interest in political problems among a class of society that felt no compulsion or need to examine the economic base of its privileged position. Seven years ago the N.S.F.A. was organized with erudite citations from Plato's *Republic* and Aristotle's *Politics* on the responsibility of the student classes. Today in a world of poverty, discrimination, war, all students are ready to take a stand. It should be behind the tried and responsible program of the student League for Industrial Democracy, a program which aligns them with the creative forces of labor which are making for a new world. Any new student movement, without a tradition of co-operation with labor and the unemployed, without a strong stand on

international problems, may at this time go the way of the fascist German student movement. A strong dash of idealism, will not be enough to stop the juggernaut of fascism, once it gets under way. Only a student movement that is rooted deep in the struggles of labor and the farmer for liberation, that has a socialist understanding of international conflicts is worth promoting.

To achieve the goal of a classless cooperative society in which men will have an equal opportunity to achieve the good things of life the Student L.I.D. has the following program:

1. Supporting and activating the organization of workers of all classes by membership, active participation and educational assistance. On the campus this means the unionization of college employees.
2. Opposition to retrenchment in education.
3. Fighting for amplification of educational opportunities—including federal scholarships for worthy students.
4. Fighting for the preservation of civil liberties, and on the campus particularly the defense of academic freedom.
5. Opposition to war, which on the campus means:
 - (a) Opposing any manifestation of militarism in education, especially the R.O.T.C.
 - (b) Anti-war committees on the campus.
 - (c) Alignment with effective anti-war organizations outside.
6. Fraternal Relations with European Student Organizations, committed to similar programs.
7. Opposition to discrimination against racial minorities on and off the campus.

THE League for Industrial Democracy is a membership society engaged in education toward a social order based on production for use and not for profit. To this end the League conducts research, lecture and information services, suggests practical plans for increasing social control, organizes city and college chapters, publishes books and pamphlets on problems of industrial democracy, sponsors conferences, forums, luncheon discussions and radio talks in leading cities where it has chapters.

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